

# Spurring Change

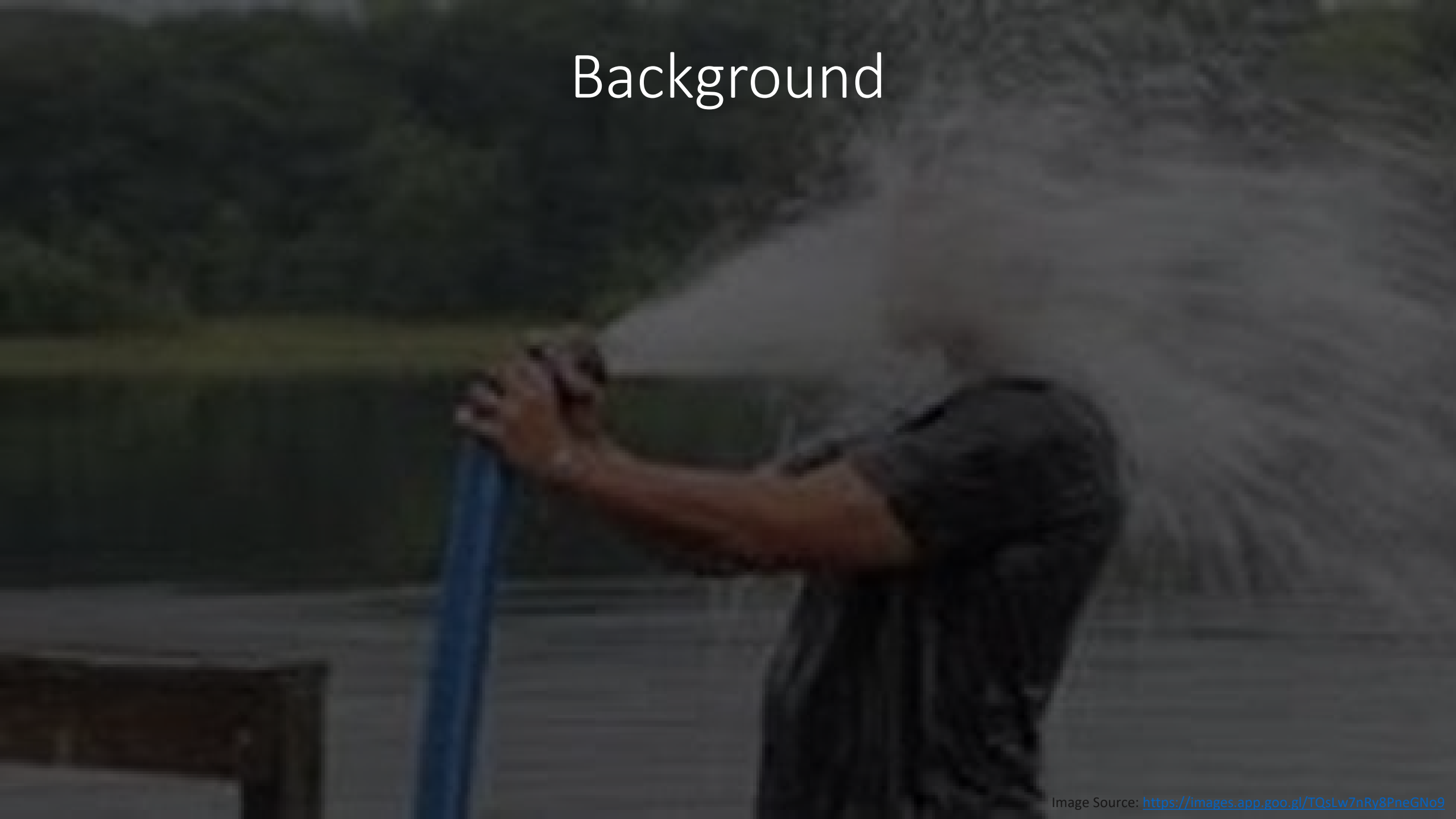
Driving NPC Process Improvement  
Against the Odds

Amy H. Kimball | CEO, BVARI

Daniel Norton | Entrepreneur & Startup Advisor

NAVREF Annual Meeting 2019

# Background



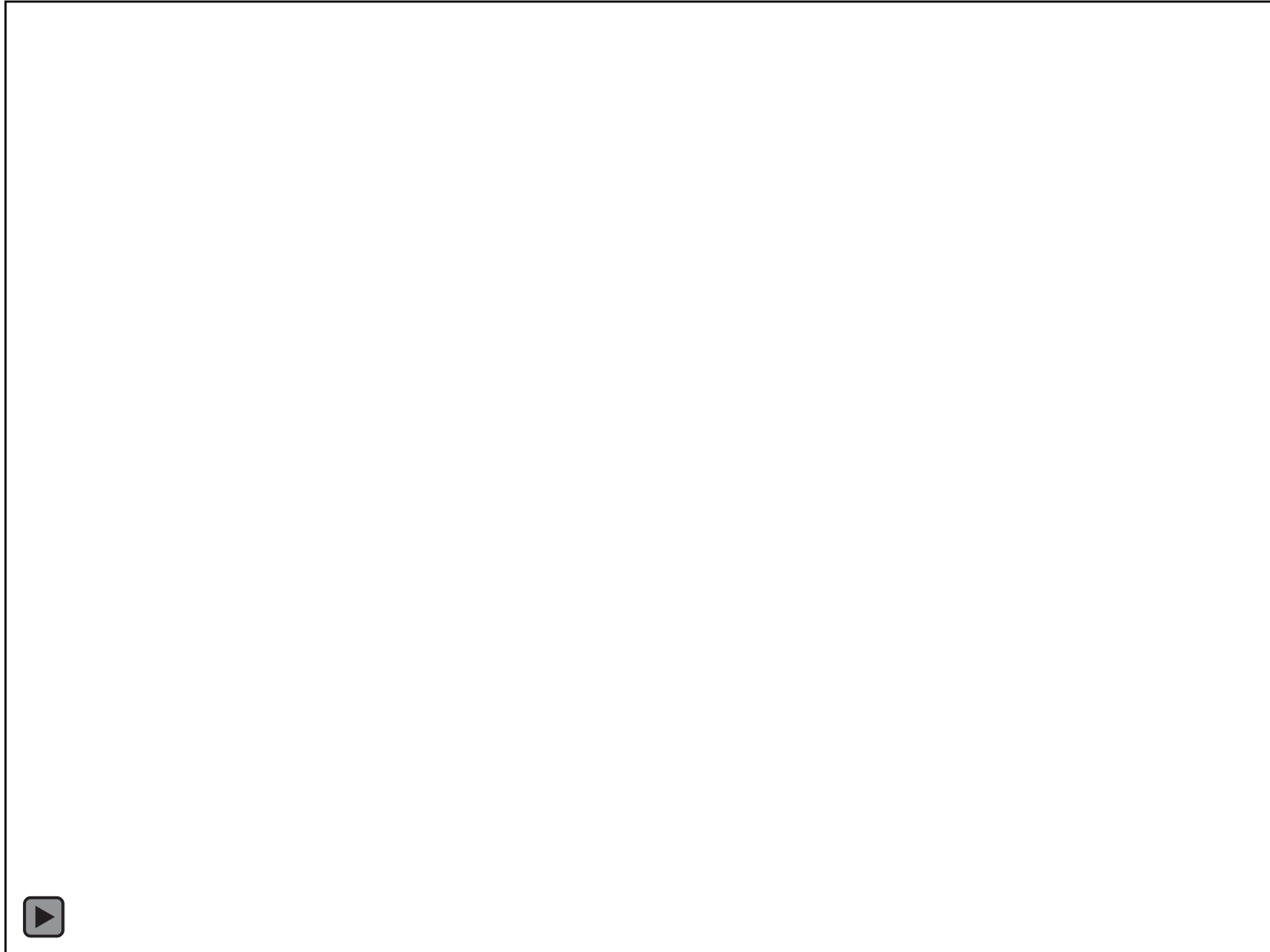
# Learning Objectives

1. Reframe our definition of process improvement
2. Recognize the difference between factory work and knowledge work
3. Recognize the impact of unseen inefficiencies in knowledge work
4. Shift the problem solving dynamic from solo to team sport
5. Evaluate what problem to solve
6. Structure and embed process improvement into our organizations

# Reframing our definition of process improvement

Not just structural,  
also cultural and political

# What Overwhelmed Looks Like



# Difference between factory work and knowledge work

## Factory Work

- Work is visible
- Distractions tend to be discouraged
- Inputs and outputs are quantifiable
- Handoffs and ownership are defined

## Knowledge Work

- Work is not visible
- Distractions are common
- Inputs and outputs are fluid
- Handoffs and ownership are easily misunderstood

# Knowledge work: How do you know what's overwhelming you?

## Signs:

- Chaotic to do list
- Constant emails requesting a status
- Piles of paper
- Poor work/life balance
- Every day I'm putting out fires
  - Priority order: "whoever's screaming the loudest"

# What Overwhelms You Impacts the Customer

## Factory Work



## Knowledge Work

- Unfinished tasks
- Compliance findings
- Declining revenue/  
poorly tracked spending
- High employee  
turnover



# Who should be involved in problem solving?

- Who would really understand what's *behind* the problem?
  - History
  - Context
- Who is doing the work day-to-day?
- Who else is involved in the daily process?
- Who isn't involved in the daily process but is affected by it?

# Your role as the leader

- Setting the tone
- Showing commitment
- Showing vulnerability
- Facilitating
  1. Inclusive
  2. Open dialogue: non-judgmental, respectful disagreement
  3. Productive: action-oriented (parking lot)
  4. Accountable
  5. Team-oriented (this is about the *organization*, not individuals)

# Is it the leader's job to solve problems?

- Think about a day-to-day problem you've faced in your workplace
- Have you ever had someone above you try to force their solutions on you?
  - What happened?
  - How did it make you feel?
  - How did adoption go?
  - How did rollout go?
  - How sustained was the change?
  - Did it solve the problem?



Putting the theory to work

How can we get started back at the office?

# Evaluating what problem to solve

Start with problems that:

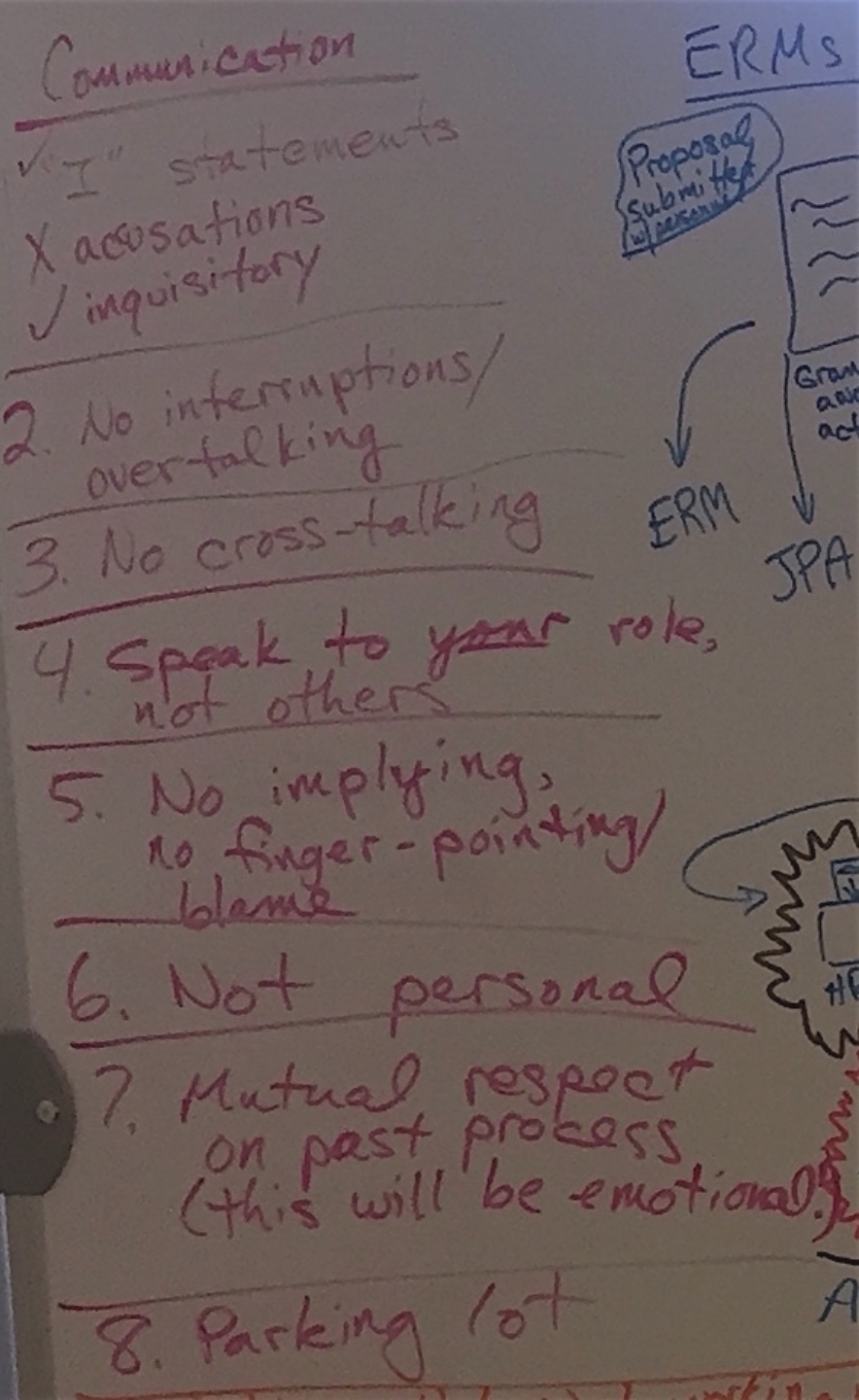
- Touch multiple people
- Are important, impactful
- Are within the scope of your organization's influence
- Have behavioral elements—not just technical
- Have been plaguing you and others

If you get stuck:

- a. Walk away for a while (lets your subconscious work on it)
- b. Reframe your problem as a question; ask what other ways you could solve it

# Process improvement kickoff

- Whole team - in person if possible
- Half day
  - Assure them they will have the 2<sup>nd</sup> half to get their work done
  - Future sessions can be shorter & more routine
- Feed them!
- Establish the tone
- Discuss what we're doing and why



# How Can We Trust This?

## As a Team, Identify Ground Rules

### Our team's ground rules were:

1. "I statements" that are inquisitive, not accusatory
2. No interruptions/over-talking
3. No cross-talking
4. Speak to your role, not others'
5. No implying, finger-pointing/blame
6. Not personal
7. Mutual respect on past process (this will be emotional)
8. Parking lot for off-topic issues

# What are our problems?

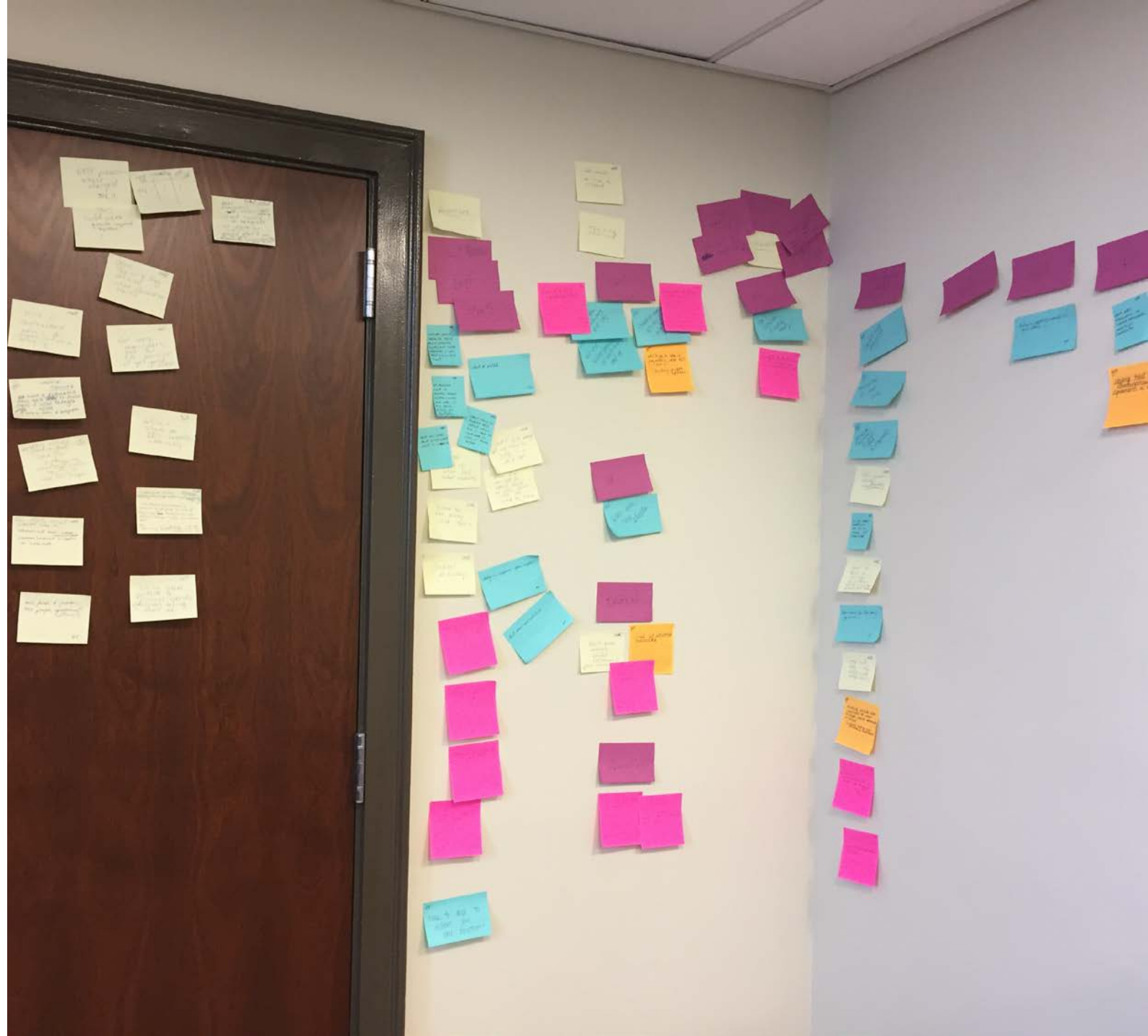
## 1. In 3 minutes

- Each individual writes one problem per Post-it
- Go for as many as you can think of
- Be honest but not accusatory/personal
- Be prepared to share

## 2. Each member reads each problem to group and sticks it on wall

- Categorize
- Prioritize

➔ Pro Tip: Leader goes first - shows vulnerability and sets the tone





# What problems do *you* want to solve?

## 1. In 3 minutes

- Each individual writes one problem per Post-it
- Go for as many as you can think of
- Be honest but not accusatory/personal
- Be prepared to share

## 2. Find a partner

## 3. Each member reads each problem to a partner and sticks it on wall



Transitioning from identifying to solving

# Using a visual process improvement board



# ✓ Step 1 Establish the Backlog

Factory Work



How Many Chocolates are Piling Up??

Knowledge Work



## ✓ Step 2 Load Up the Queue

Limit the number to a manageable set (5)

Consensus building

Removing the ego

“My Problem’s More Important Than Yours!”

Priority order considerations:

Low hanging fruit

Complexity

Impact

Stakeholders

## ✓ Step 3 Map The Current Process

*But first:*

- Assess your starting point so you can measure improvement

# Step 3

## Part 1

### Assess the current state

## MAP STAGE

(evaluation to be completed prior to mapping)

Process Name:

Date of Evaluation:

Your Name:

Your Dept.:

1. To what extent do you feel you know the current **steps** involved in this process?

1. Not at all    2. A little    3. Uncertain    4. Somewhat confident    5. Very confident

2. To what extent do you feel you know the current **players** who take part in this process?

1. Not at all    2. A little    3. Uncertain    4. Somewhat confident    5. Very confident

3. How **easy** is this process to complete?

1. Not at all    2. A little    3. Uncertain    4. Somewhat easy    5. Very easy

4. How **well** is BVARI completing this process currently?

1. Not at all    2. A little    3. Uncertain    4. Somewhat well    5. Very well

5. Who do you think is the current **BVARI POC** owning this process?

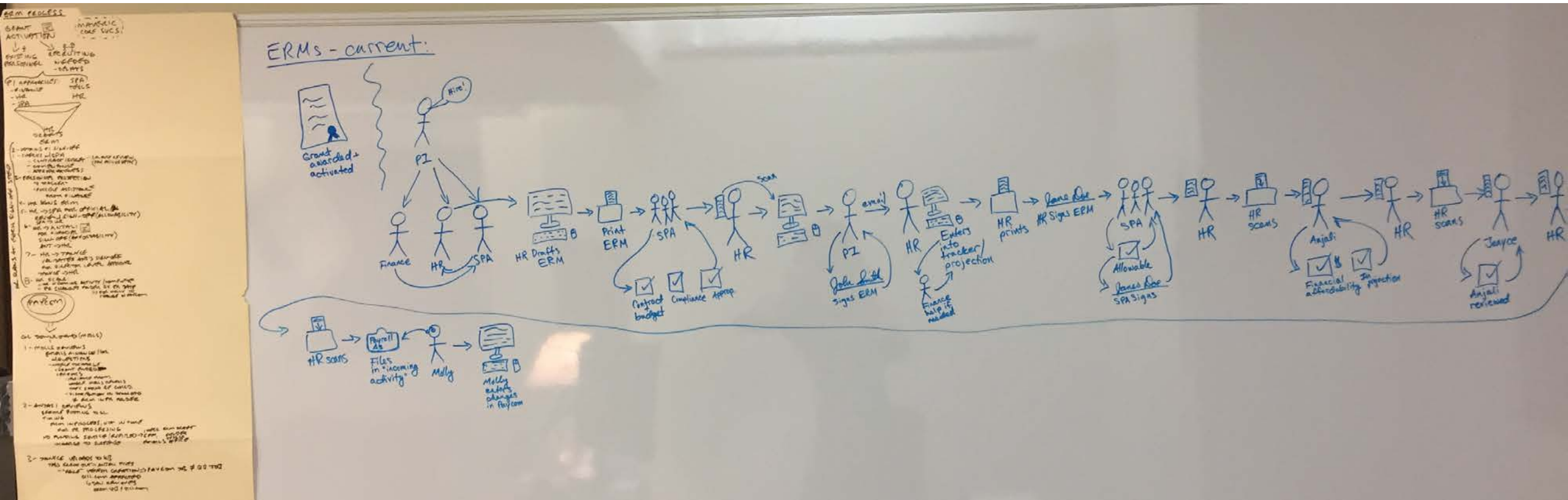
6. Who do you think is/are the BVARI POCs who **should own this process** after the reorganization?

7. What is your biggest point of **frustration** regarding the current process?

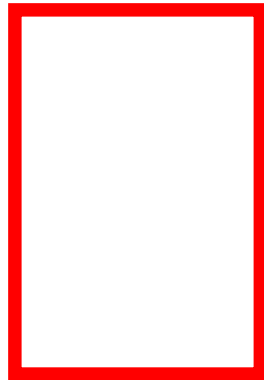
**Step 3 Part 2** Note trends (or lack thereof)



# ✓ Step 3 Map The Current Process

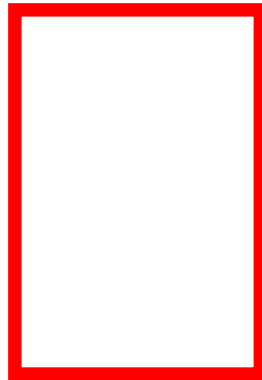


✓ **Step 4** Identify One Small Change



## ✓ Step 4 Identify One Small Change

### **Great Candidate Changes**



- Repeated steps
- Adding value or CYA?
- Ambiguous hand-offs and queues
- Misaligned incentives
- “We’ve always done it this way”

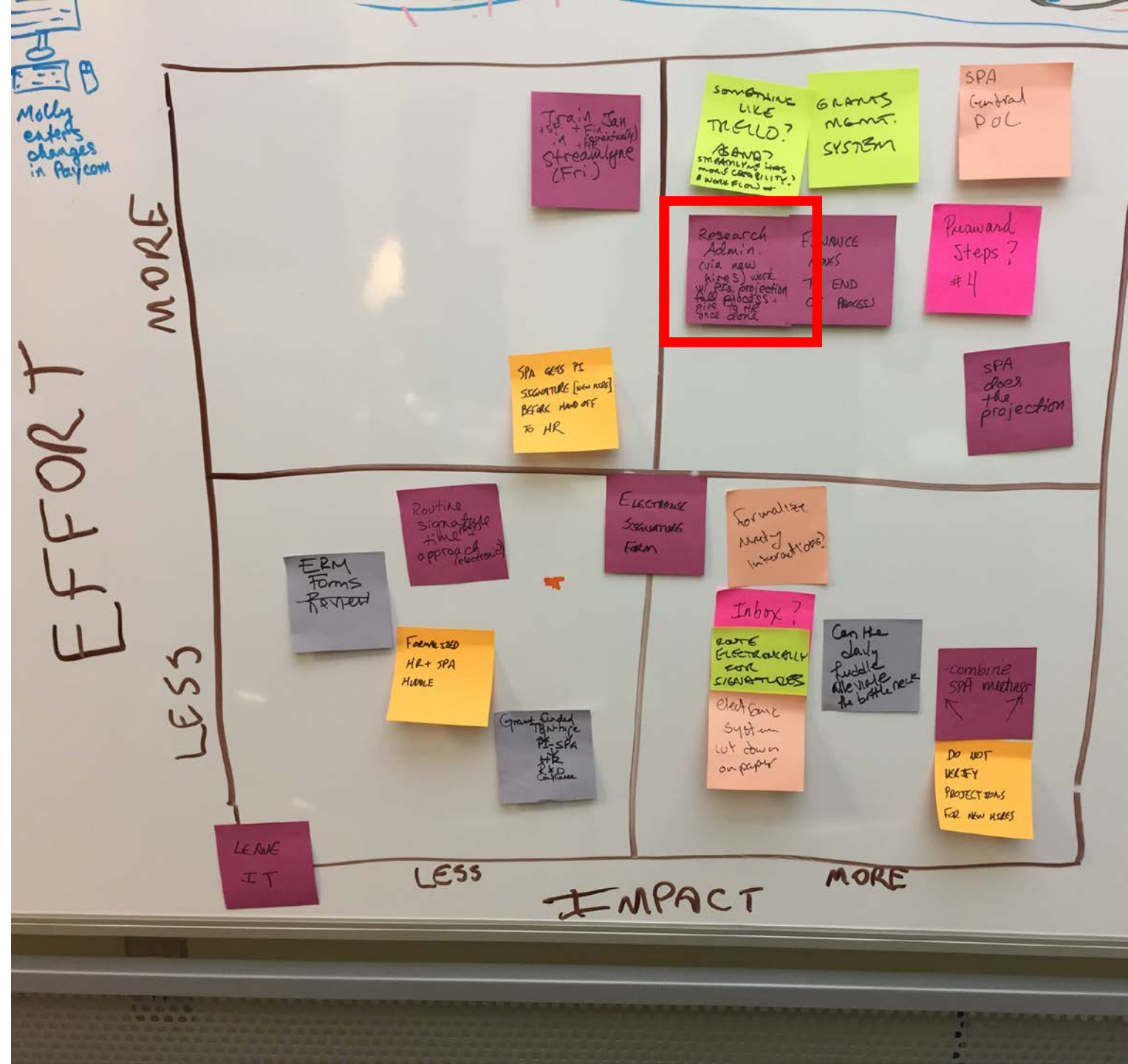
# Why one? Why small?

Need somewhere to start

- Buy-in
- Low hanging fruit
- Achievable
- Quick wins

Helps minimize feeling

- Overwhelmed
- Disillusioned





## ✓ Step 5 Doing the Experiment

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- Remember that this is an experiment
  - OK if it fails
- Give the team space, trust, and time
- Allow for repetition
  - Do it at least 5 times before retrospective
- It's OK if the team starts making other improvements organically here
  - Once in problem solving mode, opens a whole new way of seeing the challenge...  
...and the possible solutions

# ✓ Step 6 Team Retrospective

## Communication

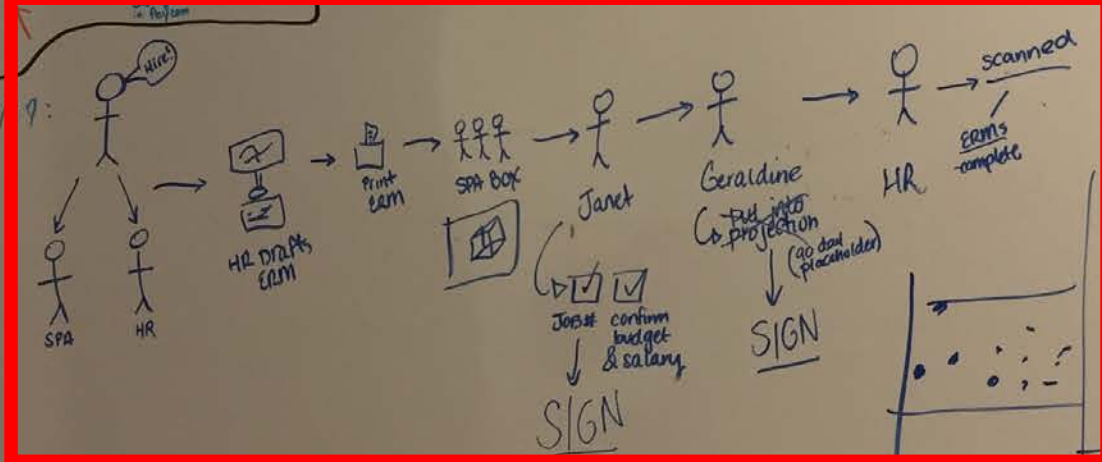
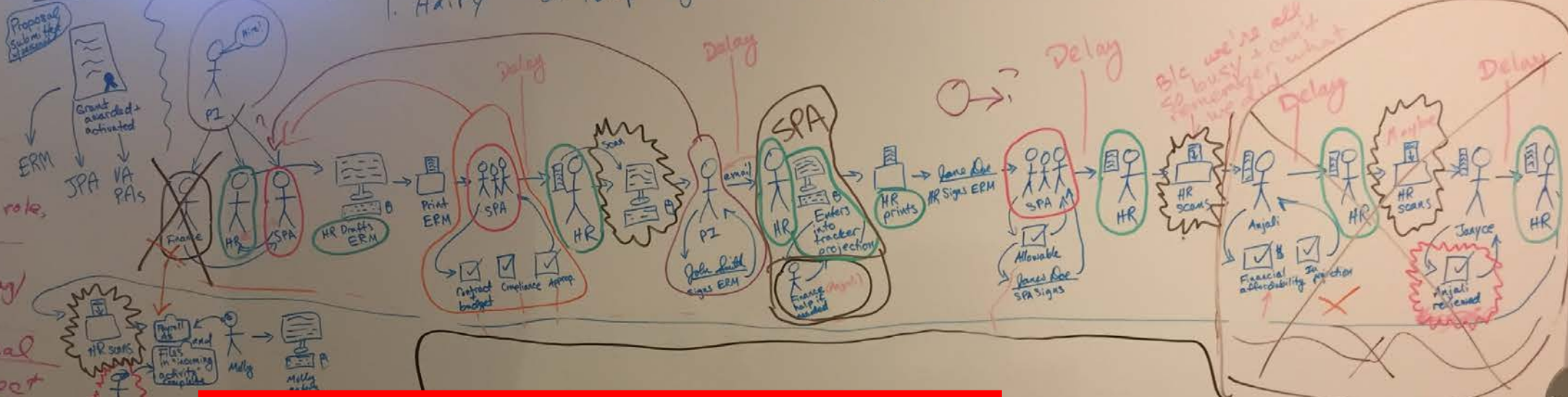
- ✓ I statements
  - ✗ accusations
  - ✓ inquisitory
2. No interruptions/over-talking
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## 8. Parking lot

Working well	Not working well
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Communication</li> <li>- Turnaround time (much quicker)</li> <li>- Clearer communc w/ PAs</li> <li>- HR can commit to timelines</li> <li>- No loss of candidates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- UNEXPECTED TERMINATIONS</li> <li>- Paycom/ % effort FTE</li> <li>- PZ going to either HR or SPA</li> </ul>

ERMs - current for new hires on grants

1. Hairy
2. Temporary fixes
3. Right positions weren't in place



OFFER → WOC approved → Start date chosen → email SPA & finance start date →

1st day enter into Paycom

# Retrospective

Remember the principles of a strong team – this is where the dynamics come out again

- What did we do?
- How did we do?
  - What's working about the new process?
  - What's not?
- Measuring the improvement: re-surveying and observing trends
- What went well here?

# Re-survey and compare results

## RETROSPECTIVE STAGE (evaluation to be completed after retrospective step)

Process Name:

Date of Evaluation:

Your Name:

Your Dept.:

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6. Who do you think is/are the BVARI POCs who **should own this process** after the reorganization?

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# Our first process improvement - outcome

## Change we identified

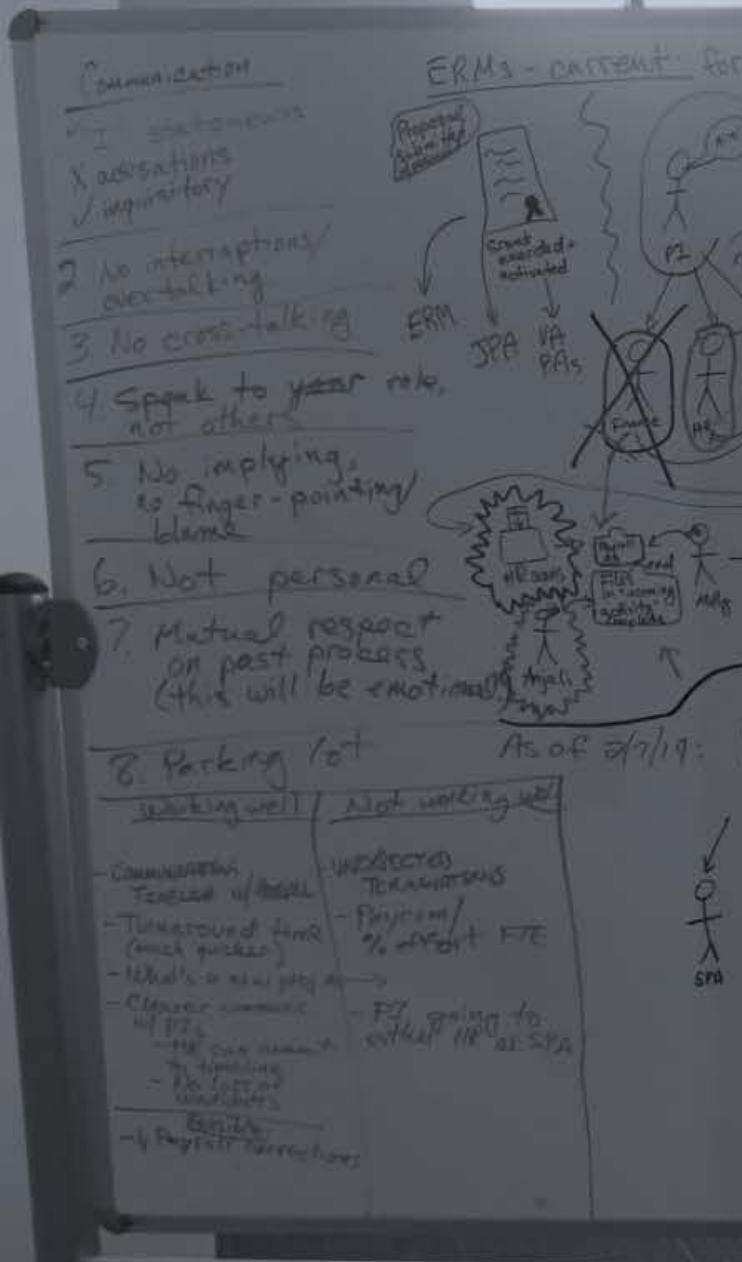
- Move first of 2 Sponsored Programs reviews from Step 4 to Step 1

## Changes we've made

- Move first Sponsored Programs review from Step 4 to Step 1
- Eliminate 3 instances of HR scanning the document
- Transition completion of form from HR to SP
- Transition entry of ERM into grant spending projection from Finance to Sponsored Programs
- SP gains PI signature
- *Form is now eSignable!*
- Consolidate process from 3 departments to 2
  - Eliminated 2 extra sets of hands doing slivers of overall process

# Our first process improvement - impact

- Tensions reduced among team
- Trust improved
- Administrative cost of processing an ERM down
- Proactive ERM changes on grants
  - Prevents revenue loss from unspent funds
  - Improves customer service
  - Ultimately, improves veterans' access to innovative medicine (thanks to personnel working timely on project)
- Kicked off the change envisioned under "right people, right jobs"
- Processing time improved by over 2 weeks!
  - From: can't get to it, too busy putting out fires, always goes to the bottom of the pile
  - To: I understand the process and priority, and my role in completing it



# Impact: who is the POC for this process?

Before improvement

After improvement

5. Who do you think is the current BVARI POC owning this process?

GERALDINE

5. Who do you think is the current BVARI POC owning this process?

Geraldine

5. Who do you think is the current BVARI POC owning this process?

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Geraldine/SPA

5. Who do you think is the current BVARI POC owning this process?

Geraldine!

5. Who do you think is the current BVARI POC owning this process? GERALDINE

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Geraldine!

5. Who do you think is the current BVARI POC owning this process?

It is clear to everyone that SP is handling this process

6. Who do you think is/are the BVARI POCs who should own this process after the reorganization?

SP

# How are things going now?

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~~How do I think it's going?~~

How does the team think it's going?

Retrospective from "what are our problems?"

What worked?

- Hear everyone's stuff/issues/input/talking
- Direct and quick – no tangents
- We have an action
- Showed what "I can do to help"
- Systemwide issues – prioritize where to start

What worked  
Hear  
- Everyone's stuff/issues/input/talking  
- Direct + quick  
- no tangents  
- We have an action  
- showed what "I can do to help"  
- systemwide issues + prioritize where to start

## ✓ Step 7 Celebrate Success!

### Ideas:

- Display all your completed processes on the wall
- Team night out
- Team appreciation lunch/dessert
- Small, fun giveaways
- Team lunch with Board Chair
- Chair report at Board meeting with team in attendance



# Summary

**1. Process improvement is not just structural**

- a. It's also cultural and political
- b. Tensions, emotions run high!

**2. In factory work, you can see when you are backing up; in knowledge work, you don't always know why you're overwhelmed**

**3. The unseen inefficiencies of knowledge work have serious consequences on**

- a. You
- b. Your team
- c. Your customers

**4. Problem solving needs to come from the team**

- a. Create a safe environment
- b. Facilitate
- c. Remember Lencioni's *Five Dysfunctions of a Team*

**5. Ask yourself what problem you are trying to solve. Repeat until you find what's at the core.**

- a. Move from answers to questions

**6. The best way to embed process improvement into our organization is to use a systematic, replicable approach**

- a. Establish the backlog
- b. Load up the queue
- c. Survey the current process and map it
- d. Identify one small change
- e. Do the experiment (5 times)
- f. Retrospective survey and discussion - what worked and didn't

# Suggested Reading

- *Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, Patrick Lencioni
- *The Leadership Challenge*, James M. Kouzes & Barry Z. Posner
- *The Coaching Habit*, Michael Bungay Stanier
- *The Achievement Habit*, Bernard Roth
- *The Power of Habit*, Charles Duhigg
- *Getting to Yes*, Roger Fisher, et al.
- *Mindset*, Carol Dweck
- *A New Approach to Designing Work*, MIT Sloan Management Review  
<https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/a-new-approach-to-designing-work/>
- *Managing for the Future* (slides, Three Lenses)  
<https://slideplayer.com/slide/4955672/>

# Acknowledgements and Thanks

## BVARI Team

### **Nelson P. Repenning, PhD**

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Professor of System Dynamics and  
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MIT Sloan School of Management

### **Roberto Fernandez, PhD**

William F. Pounds Professor in Management,  
MIT Sloan School of Management





# Questions and Follow-up

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**Amy H. Kimball**

CEO, Boston VA Research Institute (BVARI)

[Amy.Kimball@bvari.org](mailto:Amy.Kimball@bvari.org)

**Daniel Norton**

Entrepreneur & Startup Advisor

[daniel.norton@alum.mit.edu](mailto:daniel.norton@alum.mit.edu)

